[A. A. Carleton]

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Mr. [Alsberg?] Reminiscence

FORM C

Vermont

West Newbury

(Mrs.) Rebecca M. Halley

December 5, 1938

Folklore - A. A. Carleton - Nov. 19, 1938; Nov. 28, 1938; Dec. 1, 1938

“Well, have I drove oxen? ha-ha! We always had oxen on the place. Way back when this town was first settled they had to have a plow, a yoke o' steer and one horse, then they could set up the log house and break out the land. They used to make their own harrows out of a tree crotch, forked like o' this. They'd put a ring in the one end to hitch up to and then bore holes in the two arms for wooden pins. The pins was eight-ten inches long an' if one snapped off they'd, on the spot, whittle out another then and there an' punch it in. The yoke of oxen was hitched to the plow and the old mare up front, then round through the stumps they went. Next development that come on the harrows was teeth top an' bottom. When they snagged up they'd just give the harrow a quick twist like this and over she'd go.

“Oxen was better for breakin' out than horses for when they'd come to a snag on a stump or a root they'd ease off. Horses that got hold up like that would throw into the collars and heave like to snap somethin'. Oxen was better all round farm animals and they still be, if folks warnt in such a dumbed 2 hurry. You take a pair yoked steers and they could move anythin' under the sun. If they couldn't you could always git enough so's could. They'd eat pretty good, take about the same as horses to feed 'em, but when they got along about five-six years old and past their prime, they could be turned into beef. If any accident came

to one, breakin' a leg or the like, you could always dress 'em off. “T want a loss. Can't do that if it's a horse.

“Oh, we always had a pair o' young bulls comin' along. Wean 'em, break 'em, pasture 'em, castrate 'em, pasture 'em another year, train 'em some more and by the time they was up, the pair you had could be sold or dressed off. Look here, that's my grandsir's picture. Now he was a tall man come nigh to six feet - look at them oxen - stand well up with him, don't they? Well, that was a pair. They'd each measure a good three feet between the horns. Grandsir could drive now, too.

“In those days when they wanted to move a building they'd hitch the three-four yoke oxen on each corner, put the thing on rollers and away they'd go slow but stiddy. The first yoke that come was the lead team, the ones between was the swing teams and the one on the pole was the pole team. When they first rolled the roads in winter they'd hitch six-seven yoke on to the roller. Then oxen got too slow and they took to horses and have six pair on. This picture is the road roller all hitched up to go over the mountain, you see, they've got eight pair horses on. Road-rollers made a fine road. 'Twas all good going till spring and the snow began to slump. If you got off the edge of the snow path the runners cut in and over you'd go. The rollers was 3 about seven feet up, divided into two parts, so as to turn easier, rocks inside 'em to weigh 'em down. Made quite a sight, six-seven pair horses, heavy fellers, too, big rollers squinchin' over the snow and the rocks tumblin' and thumpin', steam comin' out o' the horses' noses, an' men a shouting. You see, here, there's a seat on top where the men, two-three of 'em could ride. Jolt your insides loose if you was to ride too long. Good many nights Sadie an' I have set up waitin' for the men and horses to come down off the mountain. Now we still set up but a man goes to meet them with a can of gasoline and while there's just as many men comes to eat, we don't have to wait so long and we don't have to go to the barn to tend the horses.

“When Will Carleton (Grandsir) bought this place, that meadow piece was all pine timber. He cut and cleared it, pulled the stump with oxen and made a fine meadow piece of it.

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Down there in the odd corners where we don't mow there are stumps of that old pine just as red and full of pitch now, three-four foot across. His first mowing machine was a wooden frame Buckeye with a three foot cut, then he had a Granite State with a big drive wheel. Sometimes he'd hitch a pair of oxen onto the mowing machine.

“Speaking of oxen and stumps, there was a pair of brothers out back here, name of John and Jim Edwards. One time they was breaking up with three yoke oxen. John was holding the plow and Jim was toting the gad stick. The oxen was big fellers and my, how they could pull. They come along to a great big stump and them oxen went right over it. 'Fore John could salt molasses 4 that plow went clean through the stump like a hot knife through butter. They was going so fast that John sailed right up over the top and when the plow left the stump it snapped shet and caught him right by the seat of the britches. The oxen kept a pulling, the britches held, the stump stayed shet an' John hollared to Jim, 'Hy-ar, give 'em th' gad, John! It's comin' out, b'God! M' mother made these galluses!' The boys got ten cord of wood out of that stump!

“When we lived over to the other place the folks next door had a dog, tramp dog, mean about stealing. Every chance he had he'd get into Father's shed and take off with whatever he could get holt of. Grandsir was shinglin' up the place where the dog lived. That day Father set a bait for the dog. He fixed up a split piece of round wood and put a chip in to keep it open about half way down the stick. Wall, the dog was busy and Father snuck up on him and put the piece of wood over his tail and turned the chip sideways. That dog started for somewhere's else on the double quick with the piece of wood lashing his sides, yelping at every jump. Grandsir heard him coming and he saw the direction he come from. Mr. and Mrs. Atwood was all concerned.

“'My, my that naughty mean man, to do that to the little doggie. Whoever d'you s'pose it could be, Mr. Carleton?'

“Grandsir didn't commit himself but when he got home he said he sort of rec'oned from the direction the dog come and all, that he knew who the 'naughty man' was!

“Tucker Mountain gets its name from a family of Tuckers that lived there. Yes, you can see the old cellar hole right 5 there at the top of the hill just as you turn off the road. No, they didn't burn down, they just fell to pieces because they wa'n't used. Why did folks settle way up on top of everything like that? Wall, 'twas because it was easier to clear from the top of the hills down. They cut and fell the timber all winter and burned it in the spring. They'd begin at the top and lay the stuff as they went down the sides of the mountain. Then when the snow went off they rolled it all down into the valleys and burned it. There was plenty of wood, more wood then anything else and it was of no great value. That's when the potash and lye business got its start. They took those ashes from the spring burning and put them in a big box. Then they ran water through and what leached out they boiled down in the big potash kittles. We got one of them out on the stone wall, and there is another up in your Pa's barnyard.

“Another thing they did here about a hundred years ago was to run a starch factory down on the falls below your house. They made potato starch and a good many acres of land round these parts was used for raising potatoes them days. There never was a trout in the upper brook here in our meadow, for they couldn't get up over the falls, until Grandsir one day was fooling round with a friend there at the starch factory. They were waiting on their turn to unload their potatoes into the bin. The boys went down to the lower brook below the falls to eat their dinners and when they got done they filled their dinner pails with six-eight trout apiece and took them up above the falls and put them in the brook. There have always been 6 trout up here in our meadow ever since.

“There was Uncle Guy Corliss used to live up on the mountain. When he was a young man he'd start from the mountain with a hundred of what on his shoulders to go to the grist mill in Happy Hollow to get it ground out. Along the way there were leaning trees fixed where he could rest his load without having to set it down on the ground and pick it up again. Oh,

it's a good three-four miles from Uncle Guy's to Happy Hollow. He was a very polite man, very tall, well over six feet. I can remember him, he had a fringe of whiskers, short and white all round his face from ear to ear, and the rest was clean shaved. On his grey locks he wore a Scotch cap and usually we would meet him on his way to the store with his little basket of two-three dozen eggs. He always stopped and swept his little cap off his head and with a great bow, clear to the ground he'd say, 'Good morning, boys and girls, good morning.'

“We children were a little in awe of him but we liked him because he was so polite to us. He believed in the woodchuck sign for the end of winter. He always held to it that the woodchuck knew. He had a pet one out in his dooryard and he watched it careful year after year and he said the woodchuck never failed to do right about the spring.

“Then there was Uncle Joel Putnam. He wer'n't really Uncle, but in those days all the youngones round about called the older folks Uncle and Aunt. We were like a big family. 'Twa'tn't so formal as Mr. This and Mrs. That, but it wer'n't so fresh as the use of the Christian names like they do now. Well, Uncle 7 Joel had something the matter with his neck and he always held his head twisted to one side like this, all the time. When he got to thinkin', drivin' the team or a yoke of oxen, he ran his tongue out and held it there between his teeth. He had a deep heavy voice and when he came down off the mountain you could hear him clear to the village.

“'Hi-yup thar, hi-yup thar,' he'd beller,

“When he came in sight he'd still be bellerin' in between times chewing his tongue and twirling the gad-stick round and round in his left hand. Him and Aunt Liddy didn't have any children of their own and they kind of adopted the whole kit and bilin' of the village youngones. Uncle Joel had a Concord wagon with a big stowaway place under the seat and when they'd meet the youngones a 'goin' or a comin' 't the school, they'd take them all on or in. Didn't matter how many. Th' thing would be bristlin' with youngones.

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“When Ed and Mattie Putnam got married they was to set up house down here on the farm at the foot of the hill. Wall, the day after they was married they come over and started to red up a bit. The young folks in the village thought they was planning to stay there so they got up a jamboree for 'em. Come long towards the latter part of line afternoon, Ed and Mattie hitched up the buggie and went over to her folks at Newbury Center to spend the night. George Put, Ed's brother, worked here for Father then and when Father got wind of it he and George put their heads together. Father says to George says 'e, 'George, if you can get into that house now that Ed an' 8 Mattie are gone we will fool the young bloods proper.'

“'I sure can,' says George.

“Now George an' Ed was like enough so as to pass for each other by lamplight in a crowd, so he and Father fixed it up. George went down round through the back pasture and c-limb in the back winder. Then a bit later Mother and Father locked arms and strolled down the road to call on the new-weds. They knocked and went in and George he lit up a lamp just as though they was all there. That was to fool the sentries. Little bit later Father and Mother come out the door, says, 'Goodnight all,' quite proper and went up the road. Father left Mother at the top of the hill and scud round through the back pasture and climb in the winder where George got it. (Climb is pronounced c-limb, as the limb of a tree)

At that time there was a shoemaker's shop, just down the road from the house, under the big fir tree. 'Twas about as big as this room, maybe a little bigger. Pretty soon the door burst open and out come thirty-forty young folks. They had horns and bells and the devil an' all. They hooted and shouted and had a reg'lar time. Father says t' George, says 'e, 'Now I'll stay hid in the bedroom an' when you can't hold 'em any longer you come in after 'your wife' and we'll have the laugh on them.'

When the racket got worst George opened the foor and in they come a piling. The house was pretty well filled up. George kep' shy of the lamp and got 'em all set round. Then they

began to shout for Mattie. George says, says 'e, 'She's 9 in the bedroom. Jest a minit, I'll get her.'

“Wall, they broke out in an awful clatter when George went to the bedroom door, but it was pretty quiet when Father come out on his arm, bowin' and smilin' and simperin'.

“'Oh, God - boys,' says Will. 'It's George Put an' Dud Carleton! Let's get out o' here!'

“'Oh, derie me, don't HURRY!' says Father, sweet as pie.

“But they all went. Then they talked in the road half way up the hill and sent scouts up to Ed's father's to see if they was there. They didn't like being done out of the serenade. Mother was hid in the bushes beside the road and Father out up round to join her and they heard all the planning. The young folks was going to give Ed and Mattie another jamboree the next night but it never came to pass. Father and George took care of that.

“We used to have the best huskin's here. Five hundred bushels husked in one evenin'. The barn was full and we had it laid out in rows all over the lawn. It was all lit with lanterns and the W. N. Fife and Drum Corp played the evening through. Oh, they had six-seven players. After they got the huskin' done they had all the punkin' pie, apple pie, doughnuts, cider they could hold. Then came the stunts. That was the best of the whole evening. We rode the broom stick, played woodchuck and wrastled. They did all sorts of strong man tricks and capers. Riding the broom stick was putting a broom stick through the handles of a half bushel basket and swinging it on two chairs. It was quite a trick to get in and stay right side 10 up. Woodchuck was to get two fellows down on their knees and hands then take a strap about like a holdback strap and put it round both their necks. Then they'd pull! The fellow that could pull strongest would take the other one over. There was one time they had a pair of fellows pretty well matched doing woodchuckin'. Father and another feller got a couple of pins and took stand right behind each of the boys. When one would get the edge on the other and rare back held run into the pin, that would make him ease up a bit

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and the other fellow'd get the edge an him, then he'd get to feel the pin. I tell you 'twas nip and tuck with the pins to keep it a goin'.

“There was more honor and decency in those days than there is now. They played hard and rough but women was looked up to more than they be now.”